

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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MFA Thesis 2010

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SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The idea of change as a transformable subject implies an impermanent situation that informs a set of unknown variables. As human beings we are never the same. We are always transforming, moving and adapting, while building a sense of place within an established environment as way to become more familiar with the self and its surroundings.

In the installation titled "SUBJECT TO CHANGE", a transitory event is presented as an in-process situation. Using the everyday moment as an influence, I make decisions in real time based on the reflection and reaction of those observations. A series of unfinished structures occupy the gallery like that of a domestic arrangement, while functioning as an abstraction of space between both wall and floor.

Change as a possibility, will appear similar to experiencing the artist's studio. Each small structure within the built structure as a hole is intentionally exposed as an incomplete work. The ability to perform on site, meaning, continuing the active process of the studio, implies that the work is still transforming (Image 1). After the structure is built as a temporary situation, I will return to reduce its form in order to awaken an experience beyond the object.

An ephemeral material, as part of the on site production, marks the location of each object as it is shifted in space (Image 2). Through specific arrangement, the audience is asked to move through an in-flux situation as it is being revealed within the framework of the exhibition space.

Without relying on one and therefore relying on many, I incorporate familiar methods of painting, drawing and sculpture. These techniques expand an active process of making, while informing a new dialogue between object and site. Once the space is set up and then taken apart, a new situation is created in order to mark a living presence on the existing environment. At this moment everything is subject to change.

In Suzanne Lacy's essay titled "Having It Good, Reflections on Engaged Art and Engaged Buddhism", Lacy explains, "Engaged art and engaged Buddhism are statements of values, as well as reflections of ways of seeing and practices of creativity and enlightenment in the social nexus of relationships. Both are community endeavors as well as, to some degree, spiritual practices. Both focus on perception. As Buddhists know, perception itself has the power to transform situations. If things are seen differently, they change. From these shifts in perspective we, too, are changed. Art if it is about anything, is about perception (Lacy 111)." My interest is not in becoming a Buddhist however, it is in becoming a stronger human being that understands the artistic practice as a daily ritual that must find balance between making, thinking, teaching and living art as it is influenced by the everyday moment of life. It is this approach that opens new methods to be awakened by one's natural surroundings as an experience of value.

To be awake, meaning to be aware, is allowing oneself to be present by listening, observing and waiting for a fluent experience to influence the daily practice of making. I accept change as natural in the same way the natural world accepts inevitable transformations. My work presents an artificial response to what is questionably natural. It is an evolution that continues to re-form itself through process as a reinvention of the past in order to better understand the present condition of human culture and the natural world.

When revisiting the past in art history, I reference Lucy Lippard's book, Six Years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972, here Lippard explains the work of several artists as they began to separate themselves from art as one meaning or one method that can be easily defined as art. Lippard writes, "Other artists were more concerned with allowing materials rather than systems to determine the form of their work... This premise was soon applied to such ephemeral materials as time itself,

space, nonvisual systems, situations, unrecorded experience, unspoken ideas and so on (Lippard 5).”

In relation to Lippard’s statement, it was during that time that art expanded itself, more specifically the identity of sculpture, which informed movements; such as process art, minimalism, earth, conceptual and performance art. I understand all of these movements as playing an active role in my current research, as well as an important part of the past, which has greatly influenced current methods of contemporary art. Feeling a connection with certain artists that worked heavily during those movements, I attempt to recognize their methods by incorporating a specific dialogue that associates ideas of the past into my current practice as it informs contemporary art. For example, I find resonance with artists like Richard Long and his introduction of temporary non-sites to the gallery and a connection to the language of Eva Hesse, who attempted to move away from the art object as art and rather wanted to develop the object as a non-art object. Other influences I have found, such as Richard Tuttle, who poetically constructs ideas both on and off paper and Yoko Ono, for her ability to both situate and perform with or without an audience.

Longing for the past (displacement)

A memorable object, such as an old table allows for the past to become part of the present. Being nostalgic and at times, longing for the past, I become attached to articles that represent moments of innocence. One such object is my first table, hand made by my father. This table was a piece of childhood furniture that was my very own, intended for domestic play and imagination. That table has been carried to as many places as possible and remains as a part of my history. Susan Stewart explains, “Nostalgia cannot be sustained without loss. For the nostalgic to reach his or her goal of closing the gap between resemblance and identity, *lived* experience would have to take

place, an erasure of the gap between sign and signified, an experience which would cancel out the desire that is nostalgia's reason for existence (Stewart 145)."

In relation to the studio, I use the table not only as a workspace, but also the table becomes a platform to display a collection of mundane objects that reveal time and reflect personal history. Each item being valued by its thoughtful placement can be recognized similar to that of an artifact or a relic. Whether or not the object exhibited is found or fabricated is questionable. However the intention is to allow for a bit of uncertainty to hide itself within the objects arranged within the collection. This concept opens an awareness of what is being looked at. Is the object authentic or a fake version of what is real? For instance, within the work I am making a fake stone or rock that looks as if it were found. The found object occupies a place as a memory when removed from its original surrounding, yet when made to look as if found, the place becomes an invention. The invention of place can be similar to the idea of a non-site, a place that is not experienced physically, although it can be imagined metaphorically and often through specific artifacts and their arrangement that can be related to the memory of a site (Image 3).

Rearranging Space: Withdrawing Object and Meaning

I establish daily rituals as part of my artistic practice and as part of my labor. I sweep floors, move furniture and rearrange space as a way to occupy time and as an investigation of what space I occupy. Arranging is an exercise of thought. By keeping the self in motion, this process of arranging enhances the development of ideation and in return begins the stage of making. The activity of moving oneself and the engagement with the space that surrounds the self increases the sense of flow. When considering space, I want to design a shifting situation that seems transitional and temporary. When thinking about materials for making work, I collect and save them until they become

noticed as something, while being marked by there lived surroundings with dust. Their value shifts as they are repositioned and moved within the space of the studio.

Seeking a certain level of privacy, I often start with a wall as a location and as barrier between the public and myself. I build myself into a space as a way to inhabit, to mark and to fill the space with presence. When I take apart what has been defined, my movement within the space is recorded and then erased. The work takes on an ephemeral quality by leaving behind subtle markings that can easily be swept up like household dust. These visible markings to both the floor and wall depict a lived history. Returning to the wall as a subject, the wall can be understood as a location to conceal and test. Using its surface to sample pigments, write titles and to mark time, the wall like a piece of paper, is a modifiable source that can be layered and erased.

Daily ritual, as an activity between the care of the collected object and myself brings forth the notion of the studio as a living space. By surrounding myself with familiar methods of living and working, the work can function as being both artificial and domestic. I invite change, while suggesting both presence and absence within the occupied space.

As human beings we identify with objects as a way to understand our own environment. If something has been altered we notice. We collect, store and protect items that seem insignificant as a record of personal history. It is these protected artifacts that provide meaning and establish a narrative to one's life; therefore a story is invented with each collected object (4). Making space for the object recognizes a specific memory or situation. Before an object can be depicted as more than a material or a thing, the material must encounter an experience to become a fully recognized object. It is the experience of the object that builds identity.

When recognizing an invented place as being in-flux, a blurred situation is revealed. The audience perceives what is being presented as a reality. A question

arises, such as is it intended to be real or better is it art? By reducing its form and frequently subtracting an identifiable meaning, objects exist as more than art. Rather, the objects act as blank questions waiting to be filled in by an audience. The sense of familiarity that is suggested becomes accessible to a larger audience and reflects a connection between art and life. The object, as a permanent thing or a concluded answer suggests no return, therefore asks no questions. It is entirely acceptable to view the work as being beautiful as it is still important to have a visually appealing attraction within the subject of art. However, I think this work has an opportunity to do something else by bringing attention to the delicateness of the space that is continuously being emptied and filled.

The object often exists as a prop that can both occupy and be moved. When identifying the object as a movable prop, an impermanent situation suggests a changing environment. Through its moved arrangement, the object marks time and space. During this process, the meaning of the object is reduced. Once manipulated and shifted within an installation, the prop as a three-dimensional object returns to its original state, nothing. The prop is purposely flattened into a two-dimensional dust. It is the dust that remains as proof of something, although acts as a nothing.

Meaning is layered into each reworked material to bring a history forward as part of the object. Returning to a sense of familiarity within the materials, objects and colors, I repeat as a way to develop a relationship between the past and the present. The present then depicts what may be seen in the future.

The work must be both adaptable and portable within its created environment. This is done by making things as temporary as possible. Allowing an object to have more than one position or more than one role expands its possibilities. The idea that an object or space can be utilized in multiple ways informs its expandable cycle. Materials are repurposed not only to consume less, although to rebuild and to inform a changing

identity between the dislocation of its original site and the invention of place. A platform can be a table, a wall, a divider, an object for storage and so on.

Drawing from Observation...More than One Meaning

I use drawing as a way to begin and to connect a series of thoughts and observations. Drawing as a language, presents questions and reveals answers that can help explain the creative process through its use of systems and symbols. It is the consciousness of a lived observation that influences the making of a drawing (Image 5). Using drawing as a tool, images or moments are recollected from a distant memory; or rather an artificial view of what is physically real. I understand drawing in two ways; first as proof of an idea and second as evidence of movement within both a physical and mental space. A marked surface, such as paper can be identified similar to land that has been marked by one's physical movement.

A title similar to a drawing can act as a clue. The written text as a label to identify individual work can also provide the viewer with something more to consider. I use the title as a hint, to explain a hidden meaning that can be interpreted more than one way. Comparable to a "play on words", a title can simultaneously inform and confuse how a visual object or situation is interpreted.

Titles are like "things" that can act as a work on their own with the presence of an object (Image 6). The written title as a visual piece suggests meaning and therefore a mental image can be imagined around the text. It is the language of a title that also influences the making of a drawing. A drawn symbol, as a suggested meaning, informs what it is that we are really looking at.

A Photographic Memory

When considering the role of photography and how as a medium it fits into my current work, I think back to the work of Henri-Cartier Bresson and "the decisive moment". I use photography as a tool to document the experience of a fleeting moment

within a temporary situation. A photograph as an image of a memory or as a symbol of a moment acts as a version of the truth. A memory is questionable until an image of the memory is taken and kept as a living record. It is the photograph-similar to that of an object, which establishes an identifiable reality or a distant memory.

Photography as a form of documentation, questions whether or not something can truly be recorded as it is really being observed. Photographs are often staged and adjusted to look as a reality based on what the director chooses the audience to see. A photograph can be understood as a controlled version of the truth. In the same way, a performance or an installation is modified to present one perspective based on the artist's decision.

Being part of a situation is limited by the memory of the image rather than by the actual experience. Each time an image as documentation of an event or object is viewed a new reality is suggested. The thing that is being depicted is flattened and stopped as a still moment in time. The background activity is subtracted from the frame and therefore the viewer can only experience what is being printed as a representation of reality. There is an active moment that occurs outside of the viewer's perception. This unframed moment is never seen unless the viewer is their witnessing the photograph being made in real time.

(Performing) Temporary Moves - Everything is in Process

We are always moving through situations as a way to mark time and record presence. It is part of human desire to search for comfort and to find familiarity within a place or location. Relocation can either be experienced as a new beginning or rather as a displacement. Being relocated can bring upon a need to re-find or reconnect with what may have been lost or misplaced.

In order to relocate, we must first experience place as a lived environment before we can move on to the next situation. Whether living in a temporary environment or in a

permanent location, we are stationary for a brief moment and then we move on. In relation to my own practice, performing and arranging movement is an important ritual both in and out of the studio. I use movement as an active tool to begin and end the working process.

The installation titled, “starting over/making room”, attempted to create a shifting environment, while transforming place in real time. Using process, change and movement, a temporary situation was built and then modified over three separate visits after its original install. Adopting landscape as a starting point, the central space was occupied with a sectioned platform and a set of three-dimension forms, defined as “movable land” (Image 7). Upon each on-site situation the forms were marked with dust from the studio floor, moved, and then reformed within the existing space. Markings to both the wall and floor can be seen similar to that of an occupied living/work space (Image 8).

Seeing the work in progress creates a series of new questions, such as is the work complete or what was there before? Giving the viewer a certain responsibility, I ask the audience to become aware of place as an experience. The viewer has a choice to return and to revisit a visual experience as part of the work. Therefore, if the viewer were to return to the gallery, a new formation would reveal a new situation. It is during this fleeting moment that one can question both perception and memory.

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE...CONTEMPORARY TODAY

In relation to today and methods of contemporary art, I continue to develop my practice through possibilities of tests and failures. As I discover more artists that I share a commonality with, I understand a relationship among them that establishes a practice that is not limited. Rather, a practice that is explorative in process and idea making. In recent exhibitions such as, “Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century” or “The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas: Recent Sculpture as well as a current

exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago titled, "Production Site: The Artist's Studio Inside-Out", both artist's and curators explore a reinvention of the past as a way to respond to the uncertain future. These exhibits specifically explore the relationship of art in the 21st century, but more specifically in connection to life. In an essay titled, "The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas", Anne Ellegood explains the work of the exhibition as, "Resisting the notion of "purity" of medium, these recent works argue that there is no end point for sculpture (Ellegood 22)." In my own work, I encourage the idea of no end. I want to continue to develop a series of questions, while enhancing the viewer experience. Each time the work is altered or changed, a new awareness is suggested.

AFTERWORD

Awakening a Site with Color and the Public Experience

In regards to my practice operating in public space, I want to offer another way to experience public art. Art in public participates with or without the presence of an active viewer. Public art in relation to a private gallery is often thought as being owned by its audience. Therefore, public art can help identify an invisible community and give an unfamiliar site a sense of place. Art as an experience, in both private and public space encourages a new way of seeing. Each time a work of art is seen or discussed by its public, an active participation occurs and a level of community is built around what is being looked at. This allows for new conversations to influence the way we understand our living environment.

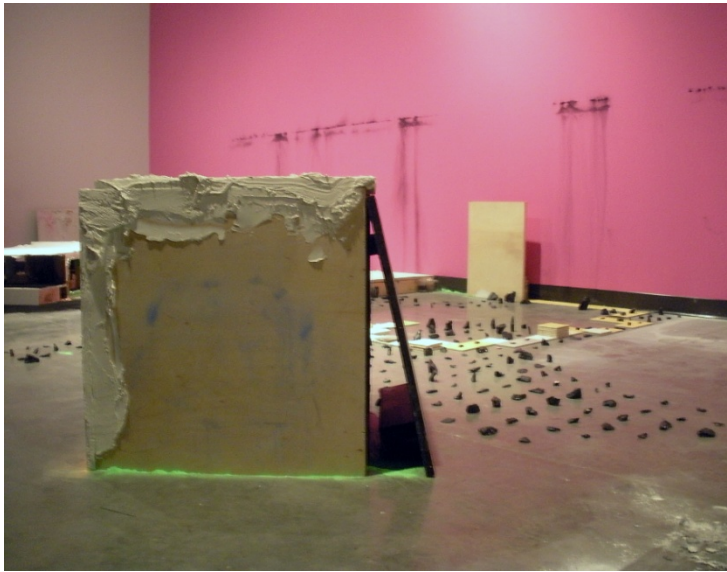
The public installation, titled “going home” creates a three-dimensional situation that horizontally expands itself between two green spaces. Being that the site had no identity, I wanted to visually invent a place that would resemble a mapped community or a neighborhood. It was also important to activate the existing green space with color. The land was dull and unattractive; therefore the selected color palate would help brighten the experience. There was nothing to understand or to become familiar with. No landmark to be recognized when traveling in and out of the city of Indianapolis. I would like to believe that since “going home” was installed that a transformation occurred and the living culture of Indianapolis was improved.

When first visiting the site, I imagined a three-dimensional painting that had no end, no beginning and no center; an installation consisting of multiple forms that would both expand and enhance the site, while invisibly connecting the east and west interchanges. The work could travel with its moving audience by design and arrangement. Since the work would be competing with fast moving traffic, it was important to express a feeling of movement, while keeping each form still.

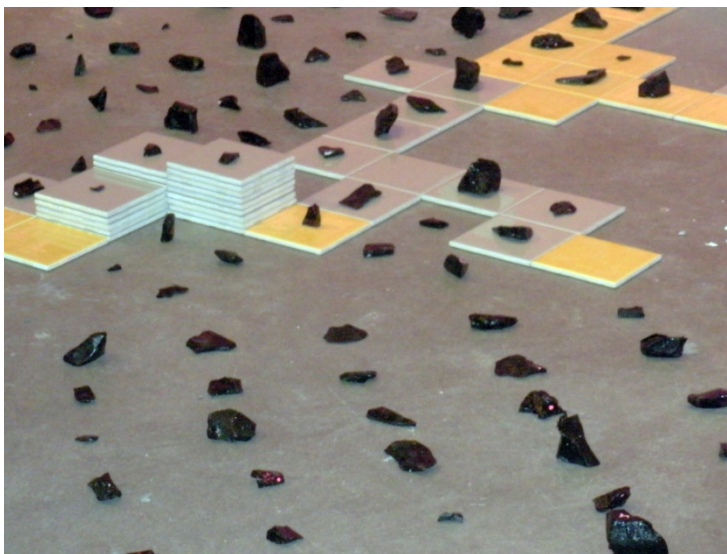
I wanted the 34-piece installation to seem approachable, yet somewhat un-monumental and to appear as if they had believably grown out of the green space (9). Each form is as imaginary as the false nature one sees in the green space. The color is an exaggeration of what would naturally appear, such as if grass were to always be that green or a sky that blue. The oval-like form is simple, abstract and intentionally made with no specific identity in order to recognize all the dynamic layers of Indianapolis as being unified through one round form. The form as a shape is designed to wear color, to take up space and to give a site a memorable landmark.

Although permanent, the installation will never look the same. In the spring, the planted prairie grass will grow as high as four feet in some areas, which will hide a portion of the planted shape (Image 10). This idea suggests a new experience each time viewed when traveling from one point to another. In this work I give the audience permission to identify with their own color and or to create their own meaning of what the abstracted form personally represents to them.

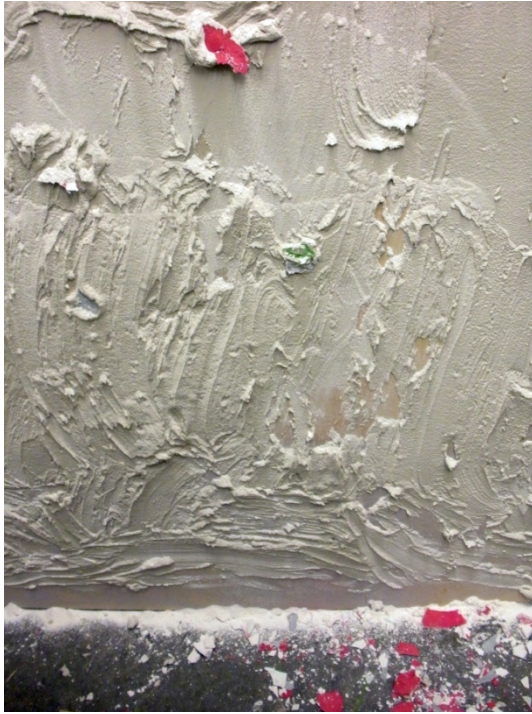
IMAGES



"SUBJECT TO CHANGE" (installation view), wood, plaster, drywall, joint compound, latex paint, textile paint, gouache paint, ceramic tile, glass bottles, glass jars, broken milk glass, broken blue willow plate, orange string, dust, chalk and found material, 2010



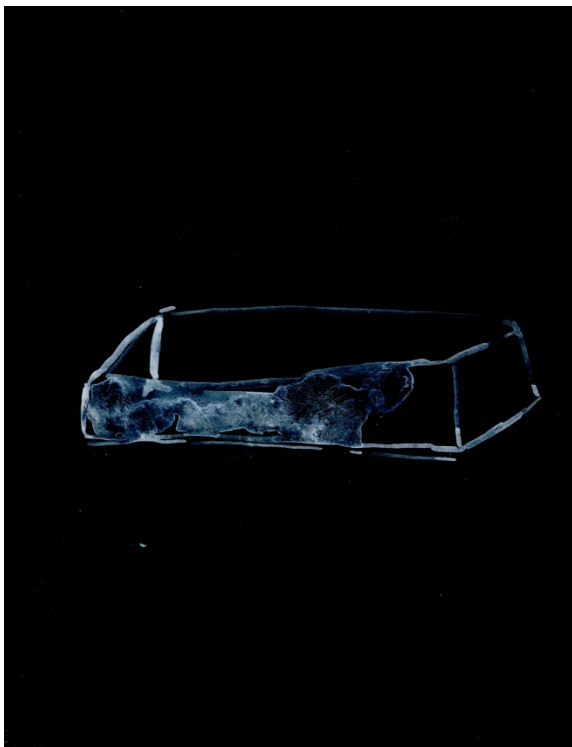
"SUBJECT TO CHANGE" (floor detail), plaster, latex paint and ceramic tile, 2010



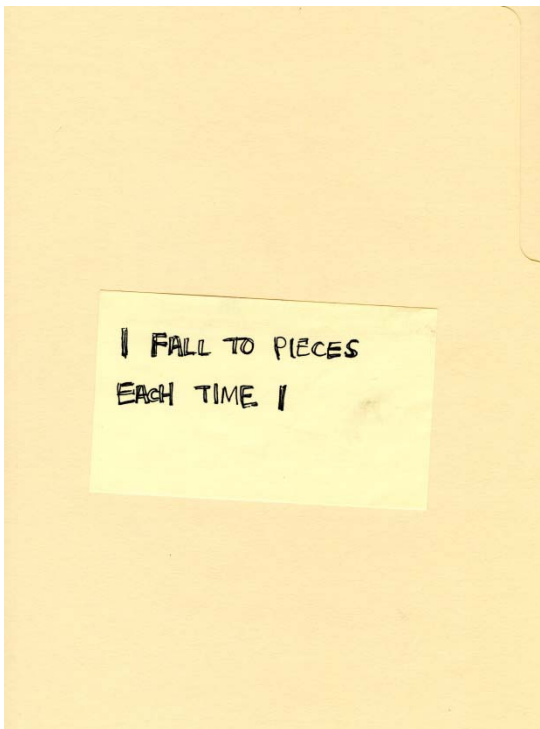
(1) "Wall" (in-process detail), wood, drywall, plaster, white chalk and recycled material from INHABIT, 2010



(2) "REMOVED" (floor detail), plaster, acrylic paint, foam and blue chalk



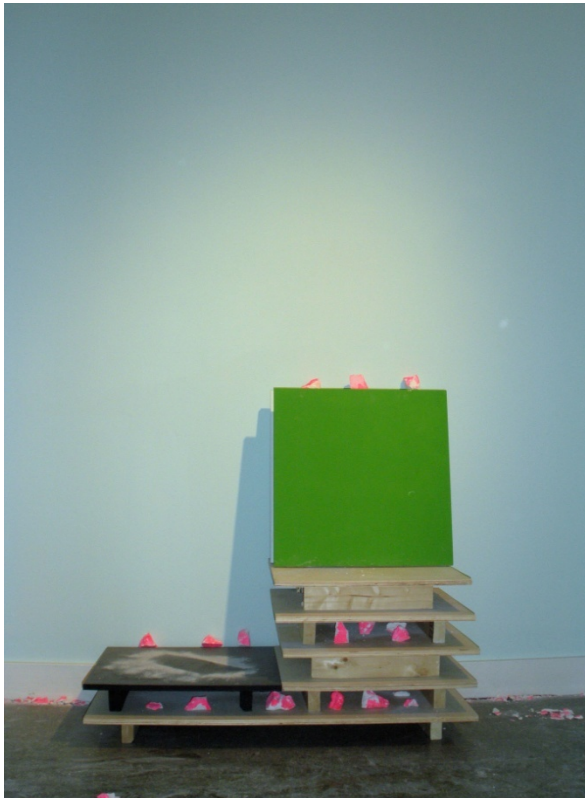
(5) "drawing of a box", Tyvek painted with black acrylic and gouache on paper, 2010



(6) "I FALL TO PIECES EACH TIME I" (after Patsy), sharpie on a post it note on a manila folder, 2010



(7) "starting over/making room", (in-process still) INHABIT, carved foam, plaster, wood, dust, acrylic paint and spray paint, 2010



(8) "alter/altar" (in-process still from starting over/making room) INHABIT, wood, plaster, acrylic paint, spray paint, rubble and dust from the studio floor, 2010



(9) "going home" (west interchange detail), Interstate 70, Indianapolis, painted fiberglass, winter 2010



(10) "going home" (east interchange detail), Interstate 70, Indianapolis, painted fiberglass, spring 2010

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